

Beginning or End?

When StoreFront for Art and Architecture first opened its door in 1982, it was without financial backings, private or public, and no one had any previous experience of running a cultural organization. There were no ideologue for heroic doings, nor even a faint of purpose except of building a hand-made forum that could husband some of our youthful energy toward more constructive ends. None of us had any curatorial nor arts administration backgrounds, and no one in our board spoused any expertise on the development of an exhibition space. It was a momentary thought that somehow found itself a reality, certainly not something borne out of some astout conscience. We were simply artists and architect who saw that being one of them was not enough.

After many arduous years that followed, I frequently wonder what if we had started with all the right ingredients in place; such as powerful board that was financially generous, an upstart investment that facilitated its initial administrations with long range development plans, public grants for planning and operating its early programs, public relations and promotions to plant the indispensibility of the organization to the community, and etc., etc.. Would that have made the building of StoreFront much easier and more expedient? Would StoreFront be much different had we began with a such foundation? And how, without any conceived plan, did it become so successful and clear in the end? These are questions that could only be replied through a documentation of an organization that rose with a gradation, a sort of an ecology that withstood an era when life turned speculative and, therefore, became fragemented.

R. L. believe in individuals not art, and artists were the individuals that interests him the most. He faithfully strolled, unofficially and nomadically, through the estranged fabric call art community that precariously inhabited a city that seemed more powerful and grandiose than anything that happened in it. His daily routine comprised of various rendevous with an assortment of unaclaimed artists who were urban practitioner of anarchy, some discable and others tolerable. His favorite daily routine was made of varied excursions with others that shared the concept of art as an ideal form of social archipelogoing, meeting them in bars and cafes to discuss adulterated thoughts that fluked acrossed their

mind like unpredictable weather. These encounters were quiet tangential in their significances to arts, as most of them never left, to this moment, any recognizable mark in the annals of art history. So ineffectual were their participation in the arts that their standing would at best falls in the category of spectators, as R. L. himself was. The most memorable of his daily ritual was sitting for more than half hour on the toilet that was at the very rear of the first space of StoreFront and faithfully entering his monkish rendezvous with various artisans on the pages of Woolworth-like notebooks.

Our founding partnership that floundered for less than half year did however lay the very principle of StoreFront, the idea of art and architecture could occur at one place. Him as a multi-media journeyman artist who would be commercially and critically unacceptable, and me as architecture trained novice already suspicious of the main stream practice that could hemorrhage creative pulses, our tangential view on the disciplines met head on to give a reason for opening a storefront that would be for art and architecture. So that what we call it, StoreFront for Art and Architecture.

However a unique advantageous situation are difficult to come by. For the individuals who practice architecture, such special opportunities are rare and young one's must wait long. The prime architects who would receive just that kind of commission are a generation ahead of me and my peers. It is not deared to denounce the less glamorous majority work we are bound to take up task in. My regret lies in the fact that our life is limited by time and punctuated in death. Can't wait. I must start something that gives me an alternative to the slow ride architecture, that in the end may offer nothing. The anxiousness role and advantage of youth among others in society. It is our main strength that guides us to the places of wisdom and patience. It also forms a power source to push the entire society into a new brink of reality. The **anxious vision** will become a patient reality in future. StoreFront must find a way to reverse this imbalance of menial to extraordinary. We shall not be afraid that our ideas would remain only, for a time being, in papers. It's much better than to be a mere servant of labor. We must be prepared with paper, what we may create in future. But there also lies a great danger in over dependence on drawings as the means to the clearest vision toward their ideas. I must reject architecture of drawings, but endorse drawing for architecture.

Before StoreFront

Desire to return to art, a desire to be free

It will not come from a movement or group of artists, but from individuals who can mediate between the sense of history and the experience of the world.

New generation against establishment—make its own structure or join in on the existing one—East Village—started their own system, but emulated an existing one—the whole system joined the existing one, not just artist by artist.

There were two types of art against establishment, small galleries (like StoreFront and East Village) and big shows (Gowanus & etc) ask George Moore about the other big shows.

"Sleazy Art Zone" [RL]

Mom and Pop art

Storefront, artfront

"expression for our minority" [RL]—expression for a minority—art as a minority and us as a minority in art

Guerrilla

anarchy—a cultural style

New York is a strange attractor, an urban kind, that brings those who chance their means and life on the road of construed culture. I say construed in order to distinguish and, thus, credit the general culture that self-generates within the mass from the kind of culture that we dwell in, a subculture that are afforded by a minor yet endowed segment of population. Like any other industries that are dependent to the human and intellectual resources at hand, New York is formidable with its collection of gifted and accomplished artists and architects. Given such condition, it is more natural than extraordinary that an organization to answer the collective need of such community would emerge, and this, without doubt, is one of many, and perhaps most important, reasons why StoreFront had to emerge.

I mention this point to illustrate that the external condition is as an important as our own self-determination in the making of a place, and it is necessary to acknowledge that the creation of something is not entirely of our own doing, but certain agendas that are greater and external to that of our own. To paraphrase this, as we place the importance of the surrounding landscape has in the making of a building, the birth and substantiality of human institutions is subjects of their surrounding social landscape. Therefore, one could argue, considering the lack of such community in New York, there should have been many organizations like StoreFront already present before we emerged.

Color of StoreFront

commend the selection of yellow color—cheap and proletariate color, usually very commercial, street sided color, attractor, supermarket color, anti-establishment

What's in the name

There were many ideas for its name; like "center" for something, "alternative" something, or something "galllery." Even various acronyms were tried, like MoMA, MoCA, CoCA and other variations that bespeaks the incorporation of bohemia. But to call it as a center seemed a bit presumptuous for a 350 square feet of space that before only sold coffee beans. To name it as an alternative would have meant that our presence was only relative to that of the mainstream and be constant to what it is doing or not doing. Calling it in our own names, i.e., Seltman and Park, would have made the place a personal one not, a public space that we wnated to create. (an organization is about being "we" not "I") At the end, this reductive search for identity brought a name that is neither glamorous nor prestigious but quiet a matter of fact. After all, it is a storefront, and for art and architecture indeed it is. StoreFront is like an acronym, but without a phrase, an archetypal word that reside amongst the street and the popular, a name that defies the identity of art gallery. Most of all, we managed to evade pretensions, ambitions and conformity that so often reeks the life of art.

The simplistic beginning of StoreFront however had a profound effect on the organization. For instance, for not making a weighty mandate or promises at its inception, StoreFront remained free to roam its program toward more experiemental and intuitive agendas; most of all to stay close with the elements and dynamics of the world that forebears and infact exceeds art itself. It was our ignorance that gave its birth, for if we had known a thing or two about the frailty of culture in the age of capitalism, we would not have started this incredulous journey that I neither hoped nor imagined would still be going on today. Had we weighed the elements that qualitate the necessity, significance and viability of art within the society that is largely consequential to material production and consumption, we would have foreseen the impluasibility of constructing an affable relation between art that had purified beyond its own good and the state that was too calcified to transfigure in accordance to time. We then could have understood that art, as an amorphous residual of a culture that has become overtly ephermeral and, thus, had become so inconsequential within the great social laissez fair of a purest captialism, and its rule to denominate the varigations in the human and spatial relations to explotatable contrasts. StoreFront, while living through an era of the Reaganization of the public through the privatization of governancy, and where artisically borne objects and works was tolerated as commodified artifacts of social, political and cultural tourism, began to looked for ways and means where art could perform in the so called public, urban and social spaces, and not within the world of art. We never saw our dignity would come by creating another arts organization that would merely extend the existing fabric and ways of the art community, but rather in creating a dire forum for artists and architects who would solicit new engagements with the physical and social evolutions within the at-large landscape called the built environment, i. e., city and its culture. We never thought StoreFront as an arts organization, although its begining, program and support laid on that terrain.

[reply this somewhere with what kind of organization we hope to build, and that we have yet to achieve]

If anything, StoreFront did have some inclinations; and I say this in somewhat light hearted and bit evasive manners so as to avoid in making the often debilitating rhetorics that all institutions trumpets in the cause for experiments, to be an alternative and being on the edge.

able to constantly transform itself over and over again. Its exhibitions, installations and projects often astounded people in how much they changed its space, and how extensive their physical markings were. As you will see throughout this book, there seemed no limitation in these physical provocations, except time and money that underlined the reality of a small organization. It was common for people to remark that StoreFront seemed to mutate itself show after show, and this tendency, which had built up over the years, erupted in the collaborative project by Vito Acconci and Steven Holl that constructed a new facade/space: the first of a series of building projects to transform and exhibit StoreFront. This project which summarizes the notion of StoreFront a , instead of being a participatory member of the great commonwealth of cultural organization that largely operate impartial and

StoreFront began with modesty and operated by shoe string. This may be typical for any arts organization that is founded and administered by artists themselves; the very heritage of alternative arts organizations that emerged a decade ago. And with the current state of art, in relation to the public, hostile and tenious, reflected by the institutionalization of censorship at the governmental funding apparatus, and the manipulation of the National Endowment of the Arts by political and religious right wings—to strengthen their platforms and agendas in the light of the media —the opening of new organizations seems even more unfeasible than in 1982. Unlike other urban and social organization that benefits from various programs of economic developemnt projects, arts organization has no officialized programs or funds that helps to upstart a new one (StoreFront at its early years were completely financed by my earnings from architectural works, and its fundings from private and public support were long and gradual building.) The story behind every organization may contain survival instincts that approaches a lunacy, a perpetual crisis management that has even attracts corporate executives to join the board of arts organization so they could observe and learn. These are the conditions in which an organization like StoreFront operates, in a society that has yet to officialize cultural production as a national

agenda; United States spends about one dollar for each citizens toward arts while Germany and Netherlands, for instance, procures more than thirty dollars. This is the context in which StoreFront began and operates today. Synonymous with it being the only first world economy that is without public health care system, art is marginalized and privatized in U.S. ; the deregulation of public commitment of the social well beings in the form of "say no to art." T

he lack of national commitment to art also articulate certain social psychic utterly relevant to urban and social crisis that hazes the future of our cities and this nation. On the breakdown of family, community and "hoods," the national policy fosters the notion of economic redistributions and infusions as the common denominating force from which all other functional elements of a social entities would remerge in due time. Thus programs and projects of urban order seems to all fall in the tone of financial quantity that can derive other form of quantities—number of housing units and shelters, building of community and social service centers, increasing of police, security officers and social workers, number of jobs, etc., etc—while the issues and subjects like domestic violences, child care and education, greening of the built environemnt, restructuring of the welfare and public education systems remains not all too complicit to the level of funds poured into them. Besides the question in the level of quantitative assistences stands the matter of human quality that easily escapes form the formulative assistences of public programs. The social strategy of the government to financially boost—in some cases bloat to waste—the disenfranchised ethnics and communities has now reached its deep end, a morally driven black hole where no visible light of progress could emerge; an esclation that rivals the arms build up of the coldwar that saw no end until its logic failed. Until the very principal fo social fabric is reinvented or understood differently, the ephermrality and intracracy of culture would remain untouched. It is the mind of society that is in need of refurbishment, not just the body of it.

This is where art, and its inventiveness, could be employed. It is the creative resource that remains largely under-utilized and misunderstood, encapsulated in socially and politically detached space of museums and galleries. Its ideal is to pry into the meanings, purpose and substance in humanity, through making or keeping the articles of life, and is particulary antithetically to the quantitative drives in human production that has dominated society in the age of industry.

For this the quality of humanity differs from quality in materialism, the beautification of objects in competitive trade, and in the condition of society of economics, art has become the last stronghold of domestic belief; a contemporary shamanism within the grand orders of nation/state and corporation/state. It is about keeping the largeness of industrialized life within our two hands, so to feel that there remains certain intimacy with our days, stoops, sidewalks and yards.

But the separation of art and society is immensely critical for the future effort to merge them, both in theoretical and functional terms, as the hierarchy of art in relation to the general public, as well as its own hierarchy within the arts, are the very nemesis for arts non-participatory stature with the making of culture. Art in its rhetorical form of cultural criticism, or in monastic state as a high culture in the residence and patronage of museums and galleries are actually the condition of marginality, not nobility, in relation to the great self-dynamic of society that has become more radical, experimental and impressive than art itself; breakdown of social civility, the remapping of political and ethnic boundaries in the post-cold war, and the establishment of virtual communities in cyberspace to mention few. Like the impossibility of the homeless on street to actively participate as a full member the society, art, in its enthroned but detached placement within the hermetic condition of exhibitions, is equally improbable to fully engage with the issues of society. Its position to the societal movements has been in the orders of observations and note taking, perpetually internalizing itself to self-referential state of aesthetics without cause.

Performance A to Z

[1-see to Belinda Watts text in Performance A-Z]

The neighborhood has since much improved in appearance and economically. Directly across from StoreFront, a market priced apartment building replaced an old garage that was spanned by wooden trusses, which without doubt served monthly parking for infamous mafia figure John Gotti and his entourage, who had a branch headquarter at a tiny storefront just around the corner from StoreFront. While our storefront was for art and architecture, that storefront was for racketeering and other more adventurous programs. Both were underground and paid no taxes (StoreFront is tax-exempt). Without any question, that storefront's programs were lot more experimental and profitable than this one. I

remember during Phebe Legere's performance, which had some phallic and vaginal iconographs used in somewhat explicit fashion, on the street, our good freinds who many thought help to keep the neighborhood safe through their watchful eyes, were uncomfortable with what they saw coming out this storefront. As you might have figured, they started to harrasse us with threats and police calls, bringing, in effect, a local rendition of Jesse Helm type censorship against nudity, sexuality and homo-eroticism. With the divergency in the ideal of these two storefronts rest aside, I find a kinship with such powerful mafia thatsuits to operate from a such tiny storefront as I too could say that an equally powerful art could be done from this tiny storefront as well (I literally think that the two storefront must have been exactly the same size). After all, art world has often been called as mafia too.

[2—see Belinda Watts text in Performance A-Z]

Belinda Watts observation of "Performance A-Z" desecularizing the fine ar of performance through a set of rather rumbumtious activities in a not so comforing space of storefront, could also mean something about how StoreFront over the years had begun to desecularize art and architecture.

[3—see Belinda Watts text in Performance A-Z]

It may be absolute coincidence but StoreFront's existence parallels the rise in collaborative projects that became very fashionable

No starting with grandiose ideologue or plan

Quick acquisition of key ideas, which all seemed to have dominated that time, such as public art, collaboration, pluralism, anti-establishment rather than anti-art

Incredible consistency in its direction over the whole span of its life —early description of its program is still active—new things are added, such as working alternative instead of critical alternative, building projects, eco-tec, etc.

"StoreFront for Art and Architecture is a not-for-profit organization based on an expanded definition of art and architecture at the intersection of esthetic, social, political and culture issues. It supports the idea that art and design have the potential and respoinsbility to effect public policies that influences the quality of

social and urban life and, at the same time, realize aesthetics as a function not beauty . It's gallery is a resource center to gather, present and disseminate alternative information and ideals, a space donated to the enhancement of the built environment. Comprised of artists, designers, architects and citizens who welcomes and thrives on the passionate and pluralistic concept for urban life, StoreFront is an evolutionary project to respond and commit to the fulfillment of public life."

citizens not audiences or patrons